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To examine new approaches to film study, "Nothing But a Man," which portrays the difficulties encountered by a young Negro in the South, was taught experimentally in three 11th-grade English classes at Cheshire High School, Connecticut. A different method of approaching the movie was used in each class to determine effective teaching methods for varying abilities, materials helpful in preparing film study units, and the effects of films on students, teachers, and the English curriculum. One group viewed it without previous preparation, whereas the other two used study guides and film extracts before seeing the film. Discussions focused on stereotyped roles and attitudes reflected in the movie, on the meaning of the home and the archetypal "wanderer," or on filmic techniques. All approaches proved valuable because they were centered on the movie itself. For the experience of the film to be fully articulated, however, both the film and the philosophy and practices of screen education must be understood. (JB)

THE TEACHERS GUIDE TO
media
AND METHODS

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NOTHING BUT A MAN

CAST

Duff Anderson	Ivan Dixon
Josie	Abbey Lincoln
Lee	Gloria Foster
Will Anderson	Julius Harris
Driver	Martin Priest
Frankie	Leonard Parker
Jocko	Yaphet Kotto
Rev. Dawson	Stanley Greene
Effie Simms	Helen Lounck
Doris	Helene Arrindell
Car Owner	Walter Wilson
Pop	Milton Williams
Riddick	Melvin Stewart

CREDITS

Produced by Robert Young, Michael Roemer, Robert Rubin
Directed by Michael Roemer
Screenplay by Michael Roemer and Robert Young
Photography by Robert Young
Edited by Luke Bennett
Harmonica Music by Wilbur Kirk
Sound by Robert Rubin

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by Frank Manchel

TE 000 480

EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES to film study are hard to come by, despite the fact that they are sorely needed. Curriculum-oriented programs (*Great Expectations* is coming up in the syllabus; let's get the movie to run along with it), while they serve as excellent camouflage for getting films into the classroom, are only a small part of the picture. They tend to relegate the film to a secondary or supporting role and miss the larger picture of film as the *primary* experience. The see-it-and-react method is fine, so long as it doesn't exist through default, that is, in lieu of an ability to treat film material. Teachers who want to work with film yet who, because of their inexpertise, handle it as raw, primitive material without attempting to pre-structure or, for that matter, post-structure it, often resort to this technique.

New approaches (which work off of or use traditional techniques) must be tried, for that is the only way a philosophy and a practice of screen education will develop.

With this in mind, I convinced the principal and chairman of the English Dept. at Cheshire High School (Cheshire, Conn.) to experiment with *Nothing But a Man*. I agreed to supply study guide materials to three experienced English teachers. In turn the teachers agreed to teach the movie to their 270 juniors—in classes ranging from general to honors.

The experiment made possible the evaluation of a number of important objectives. (1) What approaches work best with different abilities; (2) what effects do movies have on the students, the teachers, and the curriculum; (3) how would a movie like *Nothing But a Man* (as an example of an entire genre) sit with students in an all-white suburban school; (4) using film as a base, what ways of extending student interest, broadening their experience and widening their knowledge, could be discovered. I was interested in two further areas: what materials would be most helpful for teachers in preparing film study units and, secondly, how could movies retain their vitality and not be sterilized by the rigors of the curriculum. The following comments suggest some of our answers.

At our initial meeting, the instructors (Harriet Schilo, Fran McLaughlin, and John Griffin) wanted to know what *Nothing But a Man* was about. I explained that the film portrays—in a highly naturalistic mode—the difficulties that a young Negro, Duff Anderson, encounters in searching for identity and acceptance in a Southern community. The teachers felt that since the role of the Negro in American society had been a major topic in their American Lit. curriculum, there were many possibilities for classroom correlation (general curriculum tie-ins are, incidentally, usually more fruitful than specific ones). We agreed that each teacher would approach the film differently in order that various approaches could be tested. Mr. Griffin decided that he would present no introduction to the film at all. His students would come to the movie "cold." The others agreed to show a film extract prior to the complete screening. Both approaches worked well. Because the school was using a modular schedule, a double period was set aside for the showing of the film to all the juniors simultaneously. The value here is in seeing the entire film.

Four days before the public screening, the two women teachers (who had decided not to use the "cold" approach) received an eleven-page study guide (prepared for Brandon Films by Dr. Dan Ort and myself) and a film extract. The study guide consisted of credits, parts of the shooting script, synopsis, lesson plan, and suggested activities. The following (together with the credits on the first page) is a sample of that material. It is introduced primarily to suggest the kinds of materials the teacher has to become knowledgeble in before actually teaching a film. Without it, film study becomes shadow-play.

Frank Manchel is Asst. Professor of English at the University of Vermont. He moonlights heavily, however, in film study. Frank is Book Editor of Film Society Review *and is preparing a book on movies for children for Prentice-Hall (to be published this spring). This issue's* Nothing But a Man *is the first of experimental study guides he is doing for* Media and Methods.

STUDY GUIDE

STORY: As a railroad section hand in Alabama, Duff Anderson enjoys the relative independence and irresponsibility that come with such a job. Yet Duff, unlike his cynical fellow workers, has a capacity for compassion and a dream that he can be accepted as a man. He visits his young son in Birmingham and continues to pay for his support even though he suspects that he may not be the boy's father. Duff also sees his own father in the city. Will, with only one arm and too often drunk, is a wasted man living with his common-law wife, Lee.

Then Duff meets Josie Dawson, the preacher's daughter, at a church festival. As he courts her, he discovers that even in the Negro community, as represented by Rev. Dawson, he is a misfit. With courage and hope Josie and Duff fall in love and marry, despite Rev. Dawson's objections. Their love promises to sustain them. But their life is not easy. At the sawmill Duff is accused of trying to organize the Negro workers into a union. Actually he was just encouraging them to stand up to the white man. These cowed workers warn him that he has to act like a "nigger" if he wants to get along. But Duff is too much of a man, and eventually he is fired.

Now marked as a troublemaker, he finds it increasingly difficult to get work. Most of the jobs, like picking cotton and bellhopping, he considers degrading. Finally with Rev. Dawson's help he gets a job in a service station. But trouble continues to plague him. Duff is sent out with the wrecker to tow in some white man's wrecked car. The white man, angry because Duff let his car slip off the chain, thinks the Negro is too cocky, too disrespectful.

Later at the station, four white men drive up to demand that Duff apologize to the owner of the wrecked car who is now seated in the back seat. As Duff remains silent, they intensify their efforts to belittle him. He is noticeably angry, but controlled. When they continue to make salacious remarks about his wife, he threatens them. There is an exchange of threats. The filling station owner, bending under the pressure, fires Duff. Returning home Duff takes out his frustration and anger on his wife by physically abusing her.

Jobless, defeated, he leaves his pregnant wife and goes to visit his father. But when old Will Anderson dies, leaving Lee alone and Duff with a wasted life, he realizes his responsibility. He picks up his son and returns with him to Josie and to the only chance he has of becoming accepted as the man he knows he is.

FILM SCRIPT FOR EXTRACT

A gas station at night. Bud Ellis and Duff both approach—Bud from the office, Duff (somewhat behind him) from the garage.

ELLIS: *(to the driver).* Yes?

DRIVER: Like some service from that boy there. *(He indicates Duff.)* Like the way he takes care of us. *(Duff has come up, wiping his hands on a grease rag.)*

ELLIS: *(to Duff).* Okay. (Ellis returns to his office. Duff glances into the car and notices the owner of the car he hauled out of the ditch in the rear seat. A third man is sitting beside him and a fourth is up front with the driver.)

DUFF: *(on his guard, but matter of fact).* Fill her up?

DRIVER: No, boy. Thirty-eight cents worth of gas. And watch you don't make it thirty-nine. *(All of the men are watching Duff. Duff starts the pump.)* You gonna 'pologize to our friend here? *(Duff says nothing. He watches the pump.)* Didn't hear you say Yessir! *(Duff turns off the pump.)* Don't they say Yessir! where you come from? *(The threat becomes explicit.)* Boy . . . You hear me?

DUFF: *(coming to the window quietly).* That'll be thirty-eight cents.

DRIVER: *(enraged).* Dammit nigger! You must think you're white! Who d'ya think you are . . . the king of Harlem?

SECOND MAN: *(to Duff).* How about this windshield, boy? Like a little service. *(Duff starts cleaning the windshield. His jaw muscles are tense.)*

THIRD MAN: Hell, they're getting too big for their britches.

SECOND MAN: Yeah . . . His wife's getting the same way . . . strutting town like she owns the place. *(With a grin)* . . . shakin' that little rear end.

THIRD MAN: It's all that education they're getting.

DRIVER: *(watching Duff tensely).* Real cool ain't he. Just like we ain't here.

DUFF: *(at the window again).* That'll be thirty-eight cents.

DRIVER: You're in a big hurry, boy.

SECOND MAN: *(with a grin).* Yeah . . . He's trying to get home!

DRIVER: *(to Duff).* Bet she's pretty hot, huh?

DUFF: *(still quietly, but on the point of losing control).* Better watch your mouth, man. *(The driver knows that he has Duff close to breaking. He continues with a grin.)*

Both Mrs. Schilo and Mrs. McLaughlin found success in their academic and general classes by discussing filmic technique and its relation to effective communication. The emphasis for example was on setting, theme, lighting, photography, music, sound effects and direction. Each class was divided into groups, assigned to look for certain technical aspects and asked to report their reactions following the movie. The film extract plus excerpts from the study guide was used in the classroom the day before the movie was shown.

The assembly period came off well. Here are some typical quotations from short reaction papers written by students in Mr. Griffith's (the "cold" approach) class following the assembly period:

> I found the movie to be quite enjoyably different from what I had expected. Actually, I think that both technically and dramatically it was flawless, mainly because it gave such a clear, "raw" (not coarse, however), and frank picture of the Negro from both points of view, something which I myself had never seen before . . .
>
> When I left the room after seeing that movie I felt

like I was coming out of a pit. After being accustomed to comfortable middle class suburbia, seeing how Negroes live was tremendously depressing . . .

I felt the movie was very good as a whole. I did not find it objectionable, although I was surprised that it was shown to us because normally people are too prejudiced to allow us to see movies where there is any hint that anything may be objectionable . . .

Now to some specific methods. Mr. Griffin's approach centered mainly on discussing various stereotyped roles and attitudes in the film. During one class period, he very effectively treated the various points of views expressed by the Negro mill workers. In another class session, he discussed the different attitudes of Negro parents. Duff's father, for example, embodies the shiftless individual who believes a man shouldn't get married, should remain free and footloose. When things get rough, you can move on. Reverend Dawson, however, represents the "Uncle Tom" image. Play along with the white man so you can get whatever you want (except, that is, human dignity). Duff stands in the middle, somewhere between responsibility and freedom.

Mrs. McLaughlin taught the movie from the point of view of the home, its definition, and the archetypal character of "the wanderer." She had her students make comparisons between *Nothing But a Man* and previous works studied that year (*e.g.*, "The Death of the Hired Man" and *My Antonia*). By referring to specific characters, scenes and actions, the students were able to understand the problems Duff faced. Time was also devoted during the week to class discussions about stereotyping and its relationship not only to film and literature, but also to society and individuals. With her general classes, Mrs. McLaughlin emphasized the importance of making life decisions which are contrary to environment. Having just finished a unit on occupational choices, the students were able to compare Duff with themselves and move towards an understanding of how life choices are made, what problems Duff faced in making his decision, and the relevance of the movie to their own lives.

Mrs. Schilo, proceeding from her pre-viewing assignments, had students write reports, give oral presentations, and discuss the technical qualities of the movie. She also used a rating sheet with her general students to evaluate the quality of the film. Some items that were considered were: social significance, theme, characterization, sound effects and lighting. In addition, each group was asked to write a modified Petrarchian sonnet: one octave presenting one view; the remainder, another. The following example illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of this method:

Her father being a Negro preacher,
He's a man of prominence in the town.
He's willing to be a passive creature
Incapable of putting the white man down.
My husband is so different from my dad,
He'll fight for Negro rights until he dies.
Sorrow and trouble is all he has had,
His hatred for the whites shows in his eyes.
Inwardly I feel my husband is right
But because of my father's impression
I am unable to join in his fight,
As a wife this is my transgression.
My husband will always have my respect
My consolations I hope he'll accept.

In conclusion, let me quote the teachers' evaluations of the units.

Griffin: The racial situation presented in this movie is clearly the source of Duff's dilemma but, as is true in all good works, the lesson Duff learns is relevant and important to all of us. The value in a predominantly white school is not lessened at all by the racial situation. The students are made aware of both the racial problem and also their own worth as humans (i.e., the importance of not sacrificing their own self-respect for the comfort of social stability). I noticed with my low group a high degree of viewing sophistication. They are very well attuned to film experience, and get a great deal out of it.

McLaughlin: Reactions of the group were unanimously positive in classroom situation. Classes agreed that this film is a good one for inclusion in English curriculum, although students admitted they would not go to see this movie on a Saturday night date. Immediate reactions of students after showing of film—unsolicited personal comments: "great," "so real," "terrific," "Wasn't that just a lot of propaganda for the colored."

Schilo: Slow learners were definitely helped by the film—first, more was covered in a shorter space of time; second, more literary techniques were introduced because viewing was more vivid and faster than reading, and pictures conveyed so much more. For example, tone and mood were explored more through film techniques of light and dark shots, near and far shots, sound and music, etc. Third, the facial expressions, at times, conveyed more than words.

The value of approaches like these (and, by reflection, of an article like this) is that they are immersed in the materials that surround a film—from credits, to script, to actual film. The moral seems to be that teachers must be prepared for the films they want to teach, otherwise the end of the film might well signal the end of student-involvement. The experience of a film must be articulated; to articulate it, teachers must know where the joints and the bones are.

WHERE TO GET IT

Nothing But a Man (b/w, 92 minutes)
Rental: Brandon Films, Inc., 221 West 57 St, New York, New York 10019. $5.00 (INFOCARD 88)